

From your corner of the world ... to the world in your backyard

# The Daily Times

## Who said that? Someone is misquoting

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— There are now numerous stories containing quotes from Attorney General Drew Edmondson and his minion Charlie Price stating the well at Country Cottage is “likely the source” of the E. coli contamination there.

Confident that no news story, written by this paper or any other, ever got that information from any official source, I contacted them again to be sure.

Skylar McElhaney from The Department of Environmental Quality said “that did not come from us.” Even though DEQ has recently tested some wells in the Locust Grove area, they have never given any possible source for E. coli 0111 which caused the outbreak, because they do not know and cannot determine where it came from.

Remember that E. coli which caused the Country Cottage outbreak was strain 0111. You may also remember from numerous recent stories that E. coli 0111 is common to animal digestive tracts and not poultry. Logic suggests the outbreak was not related to poultry, wherever it originated.

Leslea Bennett-Webb with the State Department of Health Office of Communications said her organization never said the well at Country Cottage was the likely source of the outbreak.

“We looked at all of the potential vehicles of transmission of bacteria E. coli 0111. As you know this is a very rare type of E. coli,” said Bennett-Webb. “We looked at all the ways it could be introduced.

“The source is Country Cottage Restaurant. The thing that made people sick was E. coli 0111. How it got into Country Cottage was not determined,” said Bennett-Webb.

Bennett-Webb went on to say that E. coli 0111 was not found but “it does not mean none of those vehicles can be eliminated.

“When we issue our final report in a few weeks there will be no smoking gun,” said Bennett-Webb.

Bennett-Webb also said because it was such a unique outbreak, the State Department of Health was very careful in their testing.

A Sept. 2, 2008, situation update from the Oklahoma State Department of Health said “laboratory analysis of water samples taken from a private well on the property of the Country Cottage restaurant in Locust Grove has found no disease-causing bacteria.”

“The well water is not the source of this outbreak,” said State Epidemiologist Dr. Kristy Bradley. “We are continuing our efforts to conduct microbiological testing of food preparation and serving surfaces in the restaurant, and we continue to interview cases, as we try to establish an association with those who became ill and a potential source.”

Recently Ed Brocksmith of Illinois Scenic Rivers sent an e-mail informing me Dr. Bradley said the well is the likely cause of the outbreak. I doubt Dr. Bradley changed her opinion 180 degrees just because some bacteria was found in wells around Locust Grove in the last week. Especially since the bacteria found has not been strain 0111, the one responsible for the outbreak.

So I am baffled the AG, his staff and his supporters keep quoting official sources who tell me the exact opposite. Someone is lying. I hardly think officials at the state’s departments are telling me one thing and the AG’s office the opposite.

The dynamics of this song have changed every time a new possible opportunity came along to shut down poultry production in northeast Oklahoma. First the pollution was nitrates. Then the pollution was phosphates that made the algae grow. Then the pollution was labeled as bacteria (of any kind, I guess) in poultry litter.

EXHIBIT

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Now the pollution is E. coli specifically.

A federal judge told the AG he did not present adequate proof to stop the use of poultry litter as fertilizer until his long and expensive lawsuit against 13 poultry companies is over. The judge said it has not yet been proven poultry litter is the largest cause of pollution in the Illinois River Watershed. The AG is appealing that decision.

In another effort to shut down the use of litter as fertilizer, the AG appealed to the DEQ after E. coli (not the strain that caused the outbreak) was found in some wells on property in the watershed. The DEQ didn't have that power, but wouldn't have used it if they had.

In the meantime, a federal judge decided the AG's office did not get proper discovery documents to the poultry companies' lawyers on time. That judge has ordered Oklahoma responsible for attorneys fees and costs.

The AG says private attorneys are trying his giant lawsuit on a contingency basis. Except the AG and his staff spend untold hours on the lawsuit and we pay them. In fact, I guess I helped pay Charlie Price to write that editorial saying I'm wrong about the entire poultry lawsuit issue. In fact, he said I just make all sorts of erroneous statements with no grasp of the issue.

The AG provided free well testing. Who do you think paid for that?

Then there are those pesky fees and costs the judge ordered Oklahoma to pay. Where do you think that money will come from?

A Tulsa World story said the current cost of the poultry lawsuit stands at \$25 million.

The AG is out of control. He is spending taxpayer time and money to build a platform to the governor's mansion. I don't understand how he can decide to fire up a lawsuit with our money without asking if we want to pay for it, but that's what he's done. Everybody needs a platform issue, I guess.

Let him prove his case in court. That's coming. Until then, until it is proven Oklahoma farmers, ranchers and a town should be shut down, just step off.

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